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SUBJECT: SERBIA: TADIC'S DS FORMS ELECTION COALITION WITHOUT LDP;  
SOCIALISTS COULD BE KINGMAKERS

REF: BELGRADE 232

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Summary

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11. (SBU) In advance of Serbia's parliamentary elections, scheduled May 11, the Democratic Party has formed a pro EU coalition. Pollsters believe the Liberal Democratic Party may not cross the five percent threshold on election day, while the Socialists may play kingmaker in any new government. End Summary.

DS In Wide Coalition

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12. (SBU) President Boris Tadic's Democratic Party (DS) has formed a wide coalition with democratic and minority parties for the parliamentary elections. The coalition, under the banner, "For a European Serbia- Boris Tadic," comprises the DS, G-17 Plus, the Sandzak Democratic Party (SDP), the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina (LSV) and the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) (reftel). DS Campaign Chairman Marko Djuric confirmed in a party statement on March 19 that the DS will put forward 166 candidates in the coalition. The G17 Plus will put forward 60 candidates, while the SDP, LSV and SPO will each have 8 slots.

But Leaves Out LDP

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13. (SBU) Missing from the democratic coalition is the left of center Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), headed by the charismatic, but controversial, Cedomir Jovanovic. The LDP and DS have had a long standing feud based mostly on the

personalities of Jovanovic and Tadic rather than unbridgeable policy differences. Pollsters believe the pro-Western LDP could be in danger of not passing the five percent threshold. Campaigning alone, LDP may only win 3.1% of the vote, Director of Medium Gallup International, Srbobran Brankovic told poloff on March 19 (citing polling data from March 12). Srdjan Bogosavljevic of Strategic Marketing was more optimistic, telling poloff on March 18 that LDP could just barely pass the threshold with 6% of the vote (citing separate polling data conducted on February 26 and March 13).

¶4. Leaving the LDP out may be a purposeful attempt by the DS to weaken the LDP base, but LDP officials remained confident. Bogosavljevic believed the DS was acting "irrationally" by isolating the LDP in this election, which could hurt the DS's chances of forming a government. Marko Blagojevic of the Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID), agreed, telling poloff on March 18 that if the LDP does not pass the threshold, their votes will be wasted and will be distributed among the larger parties (according to the D'Hondt method of seat allocation), which would benefit the Radical Party (SRS) the most. Leon Kojen, former Tadic advisor and GOS Kosovo negotiator, told poloff on March 20 that the LDP may have serious trouble reaching the threshold. According to Kojen, LDP will lose significant support from Vojvodina with the defection of LSV party to the DS coalition and strong DS and G17 Plus organizations there. Kojen said that personal animosity between Tadic and Jovanovic made it impossible for the LDP and DS to join forces, and the fact that Jovanovic publicly suggested a joint ticket proves that Tadic rejected the idea.

¶5. The LDP remains optimistic it will pass the threshold. LDP Vice President, Ivan Andric, however, told the embassy on March 20 that his party was confident it could pass the threshold on its own, expecting to win 6%. By running alone, the LDP has "never been more certain that we are doing the right thing,"

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Jovanovic told weekly magazine Vreme on March 20.

SPS Could Be King Maker

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¶6. (SBU) The Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), the party of former President Slobodan Milosevic, may become the kingmaker of any future coalition government after the May elections. Despite this distasteful pedigree, SPS leaders have long hinted they would like to bring the party closer to the democratic mainstream. The SPS will likely get 6% of the votes in an expected coalition with two small parties, the Party of United Pensioners of Serbia (PUPS) and United Serbia (JS). According to Bogosavljevic, SPS could be a possible post election coalition partner with the DS. The SRS could also try to court the SPS into a post election coalition, but SPS President Ivica Dacic told poloff on February 25 that such a coalition would be difficult due to feuding between he and Nikolic caused when SPS did not support Nikolic in the January presidential elections. Nonetheless, the possibility of such a coalition could up the cost (in terms of government positions) which DS would have to pay to get a coalition government with the SPS. Blagojevic thought the SPS would ultimately choose to join a DS coalition, since joining the SRS would "destroy" the SPS as a political force. The SPS, Brankovic said, is also seeking DS support to join Socialist International.

17. (SBU) Kojen told poloff March 20 that the Socialists had proven they still had a dedicated base by turning out almost 250,000 votes (6%) in January 2008 presidential elections for a lackluster candidate (Mrkonjic) with no chance of winning. He estimated that this coalition could win between 8%-10% of the vote, potentially allowing it to either play kingmaker, or even form an SRS-SPS coalition outright. Kojen thought that Socialist leader Dacic had attacked the DS and its Kosovo policy so much that it would be difficult for him to join the DS, even under an agreeable deal.

Comment

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18. (SBU) The DS's large coalition will help it attract more votes and a wider electorate, however the wisdom or stupidity of excluding the LDP will only be known after election day. Almost certainly, if the DS is to be able to form a government it will need the support of another party after elections, perhaps the SPS. Otherwise the Radicals, who will have a strong showing on election day, will be waiting in the wings to form a government with the Socialists and DSS (if needed).

19. (SBU) (Cont.) Tadic's democratic forces have a tough battle ahead. With all their failings and indecisiveness, they remain the party most in tune with America's goals in Serbia and the region. Our open support for them, after Kosovo's independence, would only hurt their chances. Instead, we should stay out of their way and try to do the coalition no harm. End Comment.  
MUNTER